

Bosnia-Herzegovina: The U.S. Army's Role in Peace Enforcement Operations, 1995-2004

R. Cody Phillips



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Bosnia-Herzegovina was the scene for the most violent armed conflict in Europe since World War II. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Soviet Empire and its forcible control of Eastern Europe. Even as the Soviet Union was breaking apart and its satellite states were shedding the vestiges of Communist rule, the nonaligned Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia also showed cracks in its national structure. Comprised of six "republics" and two autonomous regions, Yugoslavia had created a favorable impression throughout the world as a model state with diverse ethnic groups. In spite of a historical legacy of ethnic conflicts, the country of the "South Slavs" could claim over forty years of peace and harmony. This way of life, however, changed in the last decade of the twentieth century. In a complex series of diplomatic and political maneuvers, four of the six republics-Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia—separated from Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1992. Each secession was contested, with the most horrific destruction and violence occurring in centrally located Bosnia-Herzegovina. At least half of the entire population—more than two million people—was directly affected by a civil war that lasted from April 1992 to November 1995. Efforts by the United Nations and the European Union were ignored, cease-fires were not honored, civilians were massacred, and entire villages were destroyed. The ethnic cleansing that ravaged the country defied any semblance of restraint or responsibility. Spurred by U.S. leadership, a peace agreement was signed in December 1995 authorizing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to intervene. As called for in the agreement, the NATO Implementation Force consisting of 60,000 military personnel, one-third of them American, was to enforce the peace and to facilitate the reconstruction of the country. To this end, a total of three successive peace enforcement operations were undertaken: Joint Endeavor, Joint Guard, and Joint Forge.

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